



## Oncology Nursing Society

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### **Health Policy Agenda 110th Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session**

The Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), the world's largest oncology membership association – composed of more than 35,000 nurses and other healthcare professionals – exists to promote excellence in oncology nursing and to ensure the provision of quality care to individuals affected by cancer.

Each year in the United States, approximately 1.44 million people are diagnosed with cancer, another 559,650 die from this terrible disease, and more than eight million Americans count themselves among the growing community of cancer survivors. Cancer has become the nation's leading cause of death; at the same time, our nation is facing an unprecedented nursing shortage of crisis proportion.

As part of its mission, ONS honors and maintains nursing's historical and essential commitment to advocacy for the public good. ONS works collaboratively with policymakers, cancer and nursing community advocates, and other stakeholders at the local, state, federal, and international levels to advance legislative, regulatory, and programmatic efforts that will reduce and prevent suffering from cancer. As part of this effort, ONS seeks the integration of the nursing perspective throughout the policymaking process and urges that oncology nurses be appointed to all relevant federal panels, committees, commissions, and boards.

#### **ONS respectfully calls on the U.S. Congress and the White House to:**

- **Bolster the nation's nursing workforce to safeguard public health;**
- **Advance and ensure access to quality, comprehensive cancer care; and**
- **Promote and prioritize tobacco cessation.**

#### **Bolster the Nation's Nursing Workforce to Safeguard Public Health**

ONS believes the best outcomes in oncology practice are achieved through a highly-educated and skilled, experienced, and adequate nursing workforce. As such, ONS urges Congress to:

- Provide \$200 million in FY 2009 to the Nursing Workforce Development Programs housed at the Health Resources and Services Administration and \$150 million to the National Institute of Nursing Research to ensure the nation has a sufficient supply of oncology nurses to provide quality care and conduct cancer research;
- Expand and prioritize funding for – and promote through authorizing legislation – programs that encourage nurses to become and serve as faculty;
- Recognize the essential contributions made by oncology nurses by increasing Medicare reimbursement – and ensuring coverage – for the full range of inpatient and outpatient oncology nursing services (e.g., patient treatment education, supportive care, and end-of-life care), including those provided by advanced practice nurses;
- Encourage health care entities to maintain nurse staffing levels that: (1) are determined with input from nurses, (2) promote patient safety, and (3) are appropriate for the patient population and acuity;

- Preserve and promote oncology nurses' scope of practice, including within the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

### **Advance and Ensure Access to Quality, Comprehensive Cancer Care**

While cancer is the most common cause of death in the United States, approximately two-thirds of cancer cases are preventable through lifestyle/behavioral factors and improved practice of cancer screening. Many people with cancer experience side effects, symptoms, and late side effects associated with their disease and their treatment, and such effects can have a serious adverse impact on their health, well-being, and quality of life. As such, if the healthcare community is to continue to make gains in increasing cancer survival rates, reducing cancer incidence and cancer-related morbidity, and maximizing quality of life, people with cancer must be ensured access to the full range of oncology-related care. To that end, ONS urges Congress to:

- Authorize specific and adequate Medicare reimbursement for cancer patient treatment education provided by registered nurses to help reduce and prevent side effects and adverse events in people with cancer;
- Commission an Institute of Medicine (IOM) study – which complements the findings of the recent IOM report, “*Cancer Care for the Whole Patient: Meeting Psychosocial Health Needs*” – to evaluate and make recommendations regarding the current state of symptom management, patient treatment education, and supportive care given to people with cancer;
- Provide \$30.8 billion in FY 2009 to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), a minimum \$5.26 billion to the National Cancer Institute, and \$200 million to the National Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities to develop new cancer screening tools and treatments and appropriate and authorize new funding to support oncology nurse-scientists and expand quality-of-life and symptom management research; and
- Allocate \$445.3 million in FY 2009 to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support and expand its screening, education, early detection, and prevention programs;
- Enact legislation to ensure that: (1) every American has access to meaningful, comprehensive, and continuous health insurance coverage, irrespective of personal or family health history and/or pre-existing conditions, (2) all individuals have affordable access to prescription drugs, cancer screening, early detection, and risk reduction strategies and therapies (e.g., chemoprevention) appropriate for them, based on their health history, age, and other risk factors, and (3) health plans, insurers, and employers cannot use individual or family health history or genetic information in a discriminatory way.

### **Promote and Prioritize Tobacco Cessation**

Tobacco – the nation's leading cause of preventable disease, disability, and death – annually is responsible for 30 percent of cancer deaths and \$167 billion in health care expenditures and productivity losses. To reduce and prevent the burden of tobacco on our nation, ONS urges Congress to:

- Grant meaningful and comprehensive authority to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to regulate all tobacco products;
- Ratify the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control – the international treaty process initiated by the World Health Organization – to ensure a strong global response to the tobacco epidemic; and
- Ensure that all individuals have affordable access to the full range of proven-effective tobacco cessation strategies and therapies.